

Comprehensive Child Care Services Program for 3 and 4 year old children and their families

A program of Starting Right, Rhode Island's Early Care and Education Initiative

As of April, 2001 our department has begun to provide payments for services to children enrolling in newly created Comprehensive Child Care Services networks throughout the state. The networks are part of the Rhode Island Comprehensive Child Care Services Program (CCCSP) which was established in 1999 under Starting Right, the state's early care and education initiative. The program was developed under the direction of the Rhode Island's Children's Cabinet, in collaboration with advocates for children and the child-care community, in an effort to expand access to comprehensive child-care services to a growing number of unserved and under-served children in the state.

Similar to the federal Head Start program, the CCCSP is targeted at reaching low-income (family income below 108% of the federal poverty level) and at-risk children during a critical stage in the early learning and development process – ages 3 and 4 - the preschool years – so that they will enter school ready to learn. The program has been funded to serve 450 Rhode Island children. We hope to reach capacity by the end of 2002. Income eligible children may be enrolled even if their parents are not working or participating in education and training.

Children and their families enrolled in CCCSP will receive developmentally appropriate early education programs as well as critical support services over and above those provided in traditional child-care settings. Services are provided through CCCSP networks, which are made up of qualified child-care providers including child-care centers and family child care homes, local schools and other community based organizations and agencies including Head Start agencies who partner together to pool their resources and expertise. Additional support services provided include children's health, nutrition and safety programs, mental health services and support for children with disabilities and family education and empowerment programs.

These programs are allied with local schools and organizations in the community to present coordinated guidance and support for families and children entering kindergarten.

Following the recommendations of the Children's Cabinet Panel on the Expansion and Enhancement of Early Education and Care for Low-Income Children, RI Department of Human Services, in collaboration with RI Departments of Education, Health, and Children, Youth and Families, regional staff of the US Administration for Children and Families and with community representatives participating in the Starting Right Comprehensive Services Sub-committee, developed certification and performance standards and a plan for implementing comprehensive child-care services that:

- ❖ supports families & children in a 'Head Start like' model ;
- ❖ funds services with enhanced child-care subsidy rates to comprehensive services provider networks;
- ❖ prioritizes children in poverty from 3 years of age until entrance to kindergarten;

- ❖ allows family choice of providers and sustains continuity of care for children;
- ❖ emphasizes collaboration and coordination amongst service providers including Head Start programs and Family Child Care providers;
- ❖ provides program monitoring and ongoing technical assistance to providers; and
- ❖ supports capacity building expenditures in the first year of implementation.

Endorsed by the Children's Cabinet Panel in December 1999 and published by DHS in January 2000, the document articulating Rhode Island's plan establishes standards in two primary areas: certification and performance.

Provider certification standards address seven vital elements:

- ❖ Collaborative Partnerships
- ❖ Licensure and Early Education Requirements
- ❖ Capacity and Enrollment
- ❖ Administrative Specifications
- ❖ Staffing Specifications
- ❖ Data Collection & Outcome Measures and
- ❖ Monitoring

Based on the Head Start Performance Standards, certification standards define best practices for comprehensive services in six critical priority areas:

- ❖ Children's Health/Program Safety
- ❖ Early Childhood Education (including transitions within and among programs)
- ❖ Children's Mental Health & Support for Children with Disabilities
- ❖ Children's Nutrition
- ❖ Family Education & Empowerment
- ❖ Community Linkages and Partnerships

As of January 2000, collaborative groups of providers were able to apply for certification as CCCS Networks. Later in February 2000 the Department issued a Request for Proposals for Network Development Grants. Applicants for CCCS Network certification were eligible to apply for up to \$250,000 in development funds to meet standards and/or expand capacity to collaboratively provide comprehensive child-care services. Four grants of \$200,000 each were awarded to collaborative partnerships of providers to develop new Comprehensive Child Care Services Networks.

Four networks became certified in the Spring of 2001 and have begun providing services for children and families. The goal for FY 2002 is to expand current networks or to certify additional networks in under-served communities and support additional increases in the number of eligible children receiving comprehensive child-care services in Rhode Island. The Comprehensive Child Care Services Program will provide: systemic supports for family stability and child success; a catalyst for effective community partnerships to meet the needs of children and families; and opportunity for significant fiscal investment in best practice for children and families from both public and private resources.

Our success in establishing and supporting this program will mean comprehensive child-care services to Rhode Island's neediest children will allow many more of them the opportunity to enter school *healthy, confident, curious and ready and eager to learn.*